Task Based User Testing of Collections on Archive.org

Findings from December, 2015

The good

- Users were able to quickly distinguish between collection and item tiles.

- All users were able to locate the download area on the details page.

- Users liked the large images in the media header of details pages.

The not so good

- Users had issues locating specific filters or filter types on the collections and search pages: <u>5 out of 7 testers were unable to locate language filter</u> (one of the two successful testers was an employee of Archive.org)

- Many users had a hard time locating the filter/sort bar on the collections and search pages, especially the sort arrows. Additionally, the dates dropdown was unexpected and distracting for many users.

- Collection and sub collection hierarchy was confusing for users. Users did not expect to see (sub)collections interspersed with items on collections and search pages.

- Poor image quality on collection tiles was distracting for users and made the site feel less trustworthy.

High-level themes

- Users want to feel more in control of their ability to sort and filter collections and search results pages. Although the mechanics for much of what users wanted to do was available, it was hard for testers to locate, understand and utilize these features.

- The underlying structure and collection hierarchy of the Archive was confusing for many users. This affected their understanding of what could be uploaded to the Archive, what they felt the would be able to find on the Archive, methods of search and browsing as well as the trustworthiness of items uploaded on the Archive.

- Our current tools for browsing (collections and media type collections) do not meet the expectations of users. Collection provenance held varying importance for users and media types were hard for some users to understand (eg. what about images in books?).

Overview of Findings

Five users and two internal staff members were interviewed in December of 2016. Testers were asked to perform nine tasks on the search and collections pages in a 15-45 minute session (in-person and remote).

The goals of the session were to evaluate:

- How the user utilizes the navigation bar, search or browsing on the homepage to find a specific collection?

- Can the user successfully use the sorting and filtering features on the collections page?

- Can the user successfully navigate to a collection's 'About Page'?

- Can the user successfully download an item?

- Can the user successfully locate a media-focused collection?

About the Test

Dive-in to the Sessions

Sam
Novice User

UX Designer

Libby
First Time User

UX Designer + Librarian

Karl
Expert User

Museum Employee

Bill
Novice User

Engineer

Lindsay
First Time User

Librarian

Flannery
Expert User

IA Employee

Dimitrios
Expert User

IA Employee

Homepage

- Almost all of the users located the "American Libraries" collection by scrolling through the list of Featured Collections on the homepage. It should be noted though, that most users felt that the visibility of this list was limited and that they would not have found it unless asked to explore (scroll through) the page as a part of the task.

Collections Page

- Users self reported a difficulty rating from 0 (impossible) to 10 (easy) for the tasks of 'determining how items in a collection are currently ordered' and 'sorting the collection by the date they were added to Archive.org with most recently uploaded items first.' The average for these tasks across users was 6 (not easy), with one user failing to complete the tasks. Visibility of the sort bar, ambiguous language and a lack of visual affordances were the primary obstacles for users.

- Some users were confused by the mixing of items and sub-collections on collections pages. This confusion lead them to be unsure of what type of page type they were on when viewing collection pages.

Task Analysis Continued

Filtering

- Users had issues locating specific filters or filter types on the collections and search pages: <u>5 out of 7 testers were unable to locate language filter</u> (one of the two successful testers was an employee of <u>archive.org</u>). The length of the fully exposed filter list was the main cause of trouble for users who had to scroll past large sets of topics to find additional filter types (eg. Subject vs Language).

- The default ordering of filters (frequency of use) was ambiguous to many users (who initially assumed alphabetical ordering) and the affordances related resorting were not clearly understood.

Item Detail Page

- Media size is one of the top concerns of users on the Details page. Users generally liked large images, and wanted books to be 'readable' in the media header. Some users did expect to see basic metadata (title, date, creator) on top of or before the media.

- Users generally had little to no problem to no problem locating the downloads area, but some were concerned about usage rights.

Browsing by Media Type

- The software icon was confusing to some users, who thought it might be understood as 'save' by some visitors. All users relied on the 'hover text' associated with the iconography to identify each media type.

- The 'top hat' on the navigation bar opening above the central navigation was so unsettling for two of the testers and caused them to need to abandon their current task. Both users had assumed that clicking on the media type icon would trigger a dropdown.

- Labeling and collection hierarchy in the media type 'top hat' was confusing for 3 of the 4 users who utilized the navigation bar to locate a media type collection. Some users wondered if the listed collections were the only collections containing that media type on the Archive and the large avatars were appealing but ambiguous to users. The difference between 'Top' and 'Featured' was also troublesome, as users weren't sure of how these lists were curated.

Task
Analysis
Continued

Filtering

Users had difficulty way-finding through the list of filters and filter types on Collection and Search pages. The length of the filter list, ambiguous affordances regarding sorting of filters and the design of current 'count' labeling created difficulty for all users and contributed to 5 out of 7 users being unable to fulfill the task of filtering content by a specific language.

Recommendation
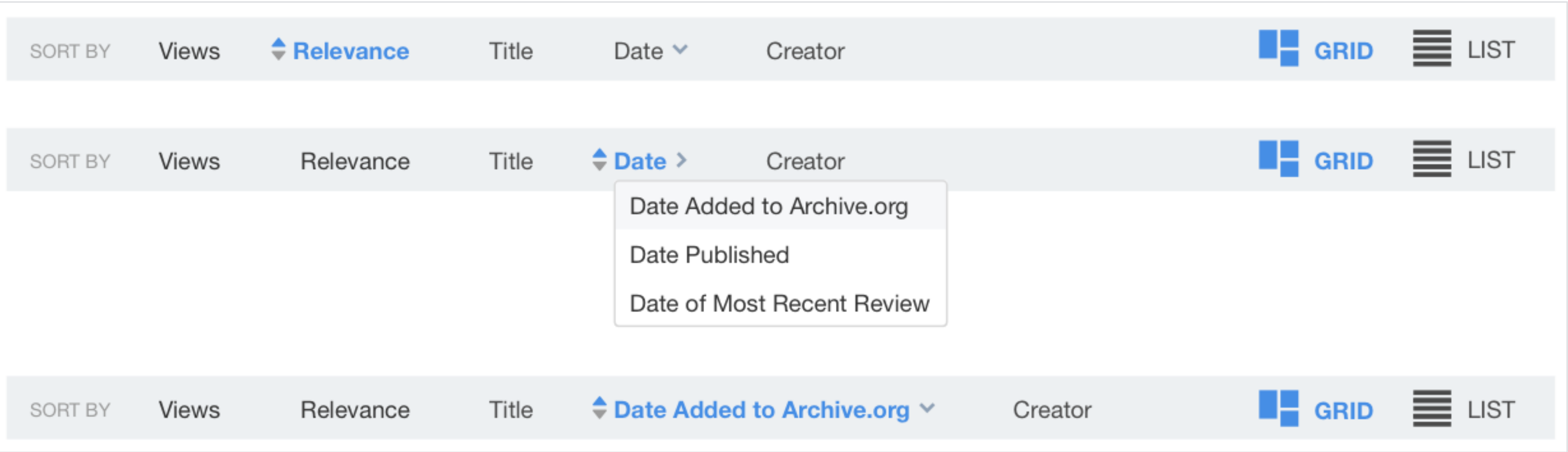

Suggested changes to filter feature

The truncation of facets under filter types would allow for more (or all) filter types (eg. Topics, Languages, etc) to be viewable simultaneously. Facets could be limited to five exposed facets at a time, with a paginated modal opening to expose the additional facets when 'More' is clicked. Aligning the frequency 'counts' per each facet increases both the visibility of the counts and also makes it easier to see how these numbers relate to each other (eg. ordered by amount).

Key Insights and Findings

Sorting

Issues with general visibility of the sort bar as well as visual and textual affordances made it hard for users to comprehend how results were ordered and to know what parameters were available to them.
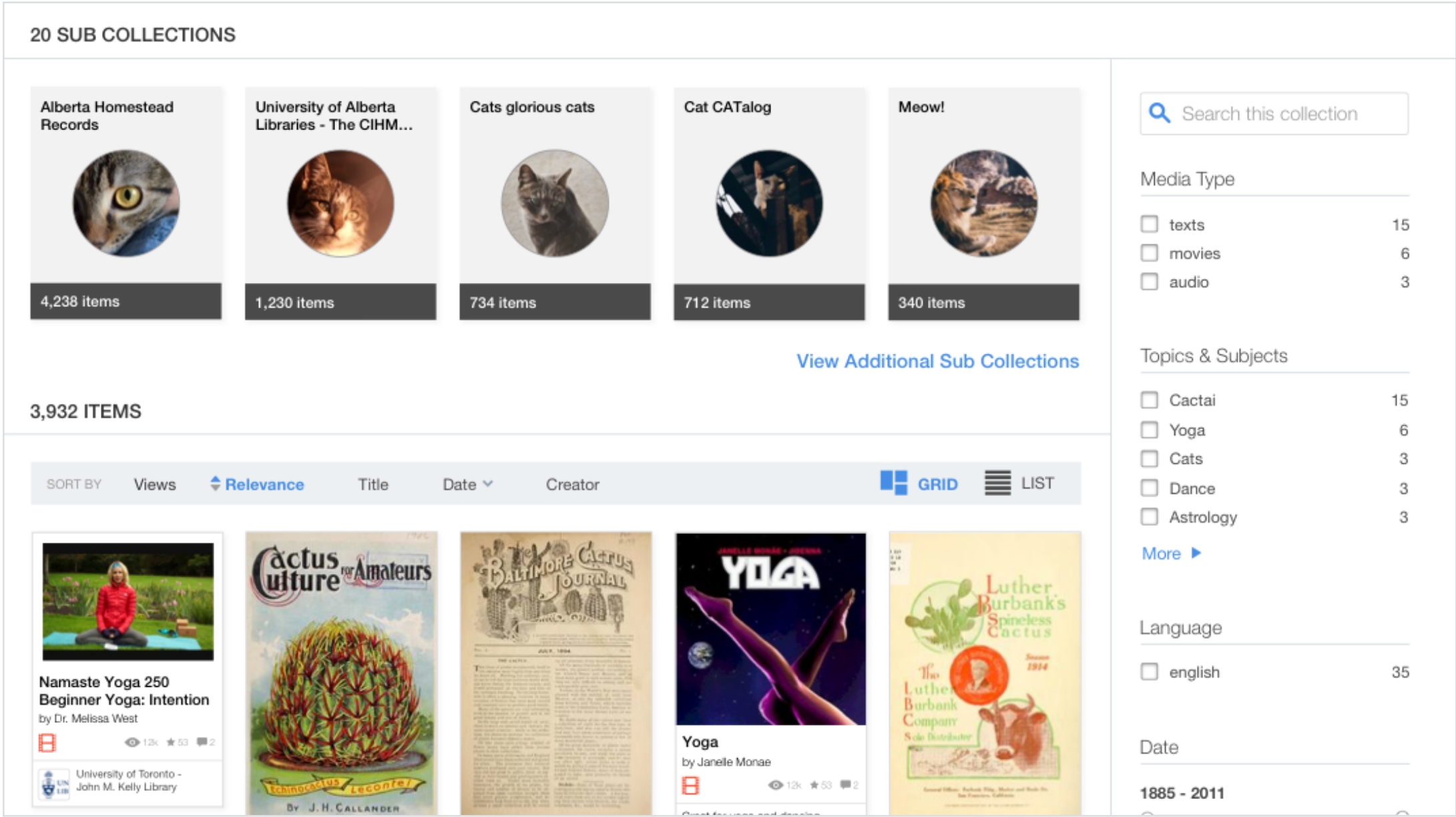
Recommendation

Suggested changes to the sort bar

The design above emphasizes the sort options that are currently applied by bolding the type as well as a color change. The sort 'direction' is sticky to the sort applied and the date option now has a visible affordance denoting additional menu items. Finally the view icons are textually labeled.

Collection and Sub Collection Hierarchy

The intermixing of collections and items on collection pages was disorienting for some users

Recommendation

Suggested changes to the collection page

In this design sub collections are separated from item results on the Collection page. Additionally collection tile height is standardized as some users thought that larger collection tiles were a sign of a larger collection.

Navigation Bar + Iconography

The 'Top Hat' (clicking on a item opens above the navigation bar) was disorienting for some users, who expected the navigation bar to have a dropdown. The links and labeling inside of the 'Top Hat' created hierarchy and way-finding issues for a few testers, who were unsure of what the organizational principles represented regarding content type and quality (the difference between 'Top' and 'Featured' was especially unclear). No users utilized the navigation search bar during testing, some even returned to the homepage to start a new query. Legibility of icons may also be a problem as users relied primarily on 'helper text' to decode icons.

Recommendation

Further research on the functionality of the navigation bar, as well as testing of any potential prototype designs.

Higher visibility (expansion) of the search bar, a 'sticky' navigation bar, reorganization of submenus and increased text should be explored.

Key Insights and Findings Continued

Additional Testing

Testing with different user types will help us to understand what aspects of the UI are difficult for users at different stages in their use and understanding of Archive.org.

Some exploratory testing with brand new users (who had never heard of Archive.org) was performed in January, however additional testing with new users and testing with power users, partner institutions and other user types would be helpful.

A/B Testing of Suggested Designs

Designs built off of these user tests could be tested with other users, or internally and then tested in the wild against the current website using an A/B testing framework. A/B testing would allow for quantitative data to be collected on the potential and current designs.

Next Steps for Collections

Questions, comments, or concerns?
Please don't hesitate to reach out to me on Slack,
in person or by email at carolyn@archive.org